Aboriginal cultural values
Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

lutruwita is the Country of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and we all have a responsibility to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Louisa Bay, South West National Park, TWWHA

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) is a diverse landscape comprising a variety of environments in which the rich cultural heritage of Tasmanian Aboriginal people is preserved. For tens of thousands of years Aboriginal people lived in the coastal environments, the valleys with freshwater rivers, the open button grass plains and the mountains. The TWWHA was recognised by the World Heritage Committee for its Outstanding Universal Value when it was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982, and it is significant to Aboriginal people, Australia and the world community.

TWWHA and cultural landscapes

Cultural landscapes are areas containing natural features which have been physically modified and managed by human activity. Aboriginal people have lived in, used, managed and modified the TWWHA for at least 35,000 years. The physical evidence of this connection is apparent today in elements such as the vegetation types and coverage, which were managed and modified by targeted burning regimes implemented by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal cultural heritage sites provide further evidence of the long connection with the landscape. Aboriginal cultural values associated with the landscape are also evident in the TWWHA including stories, songs, dances, language, kinship, customs, ceremonies and rituals. Knowledge of these intangible elements is held by Tasmanian Aboriginal people and is often associated with physical places or features within the landscape. The creation story associated with Louisa Bay and Cox Bight, was presented to the public in the form of an interpretative walking trail known as the Needwonee Walk at Melaleuca.

Aboriginal heritage sites in the TWWHA

There are approximately 1000 known Aboriginal cultural heritage sites within the TWWHA. These have a high cultural value to Tasmanian Aboriginal people as they represent important physical remains of ancestral Aboriginal life in the TWWHA. Many sites also have a high scientific value as they increase our understanding of Aboriginal life and activities. Information on some of the most important Aboriginal cultural heritage site types in the TWWHA are detailed below:

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania
Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

Tasmanian Government

Rock markings, TWWHA

Rockshelters

The TWWHA contains numerous rockshelters that date from the Ice Age (known as the Pleistocene period) and are more than 10,000 years old. Among these rockshelters are Warreen Cave and Parmerpar Meethaner, which are the oldest known Aboriginal heritage sites in Tasmania. Archaeological excavations indicate that Aboriginal people occupied these sites from approximately 35,000 years ago. These discoveries show that Aboriginal habitation of the TWWHA was the most southern human occupation at this time, predating human occupation in South America by up to 20,000 years.

Rock markings

There are a significant number of rock marking sites within the TWWHA, with Riveaux and South Coast Cave among the most complex. Although dating rock markings is problematic, research indicates that these may have been created more than 10,000 years ago. Riveaux contains at least twenty hand stencils (including both right and left hands) that have been applied to the walls using red ochre. Among the rock marking are two small hand stencils which may have been created by children. South Coast Cave is located on the southern coastline of the TWWHA and contains approximately 680 individual images, including potential representations of human footprints, animal tracks and other geometric designs.

Hut depressions

Among the most intriguing sites in the TWWHA are hut depressions recorded on the west coast. Often associated with shell middens, these sites provide evidence of the construction by Tasmanian Aboriginal people of semipermanent structures. They indicate possible semipermanent or permanent settlement of Aboriginal people in specific locations. Evidence of such structures and settlement by Aboriginal people is rare in Australia.

The decision to settle in specific locations may have been for a variety of reasons. These include to benefit from locally available resources like food, cultural or societal change or in response to environmental change. The sites emphasise the diversity of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural practices in the TWWHA and the ability to adapt.

Shell middens

Shell middens are common in the TWWHA. Located in coastal and freshwater areas, they predominantly contain the remains of edible shellfish that were gathered, cooked and eaten by Aboriginal people. Middens can also contain:

- charcoal and ash associated with cooking activities;
- butchered animal bones;
- stone artefacts; and
- human skeletal remains associated with burials.

Archaeological excavations have been undertaken on a number of middens in the TWWHA. Materials found date from approximately 3,000 years ago and provide information on Aboriginal food sources and cultural practices.

Please help to preserve Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural heritage sites by reporting their presence to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania.

Aboriginal shell midden, Stephens Bay, TWWHA

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania
Heritage Strategic Business Unit
Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
GPO Box 44 Hobart TAS 7001

Telephone: **1300 487 045**
email: **aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au**
www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Tasmania and its employees do not accept responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or relevance to the user's purpose, of the information and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from relying on any information in this publication.

Tasmanian Government